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Intelligence and Artistry in Teaching Reading*

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ACCORDING TO a study by Dr. Lazar, about half the pupils in grades four to six rarely read anything except what they are required to read in school. When they read elsewhere, they limit themselves largely to Tarzan and similar cheap thrillers, the pulp magazines and the tabloid newspapers. Other studies show similar reading activities and tastes among high school and college students and adults. Fendrick found the lowest order of reading interests and skill among delinquent boys. Dr. Chatfield, Director of the Bureau of Attendance and Child Welfare in New York City, is convinced that continuous frustration in reading is a major cause of truancy and delinquency. According to Dr. Lazar, only the top third in intelligence and in home advantages read well and wisely—wisely, at any rate, according to the experts who establish literary standards for schools.

In this array of studies there is more than a suggestion that the reading program in the recent past has been managed in such a way as successfully to bore and

annoy a considerable portion of the pupils, drive a number into truancy, delinquency, and other forms of escape, and make outright criminality the refuge for at least a few. If this is even approximately true, it is a small crumb of comfort to realize that perhaps a quarter of the pupils love school and read widely and well and that an additional quarter can be rated as satisfactory in their specific reading and general educational tastes and habits. If the situation is as bad as represented in these reports, it is high time to find the causes and remedy them at any cost.

In my comments today I shall make no attempt to summarize the experimental or theoretical literature. I shall, instead, present my own views, colored as they are by the findings and opinions of others and by my own prejudices.

My first conviction is that for a youth properly equipped with the mechanical techniques, reading is an extremely easy, non-fatiguing, highly controllable and satisfying activity. It can be carried on almost anywhere and at any time. In convenience and in rate, reading is much

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more adaptable than the movies, the radio, the discussional group or direct observation of the environment. Material has been written and can be written in great abundance which will be a constant delight to any normal youngster. The wonder is that our problem is not one of finding ways to keep young people from reading too much rather than too little. If pupils do not read enough, there is obviously something radically wrong with our whole management of the educational program. Children should be as zealous for the satisfactions of reading as for the pleasures of eating, playing, and talking.

If children do not like to read, the trouble must largely lie in one or both of two failures: failure to provide them with the proper reading matter or failure to manage their reading activities and instruction properly.

There is, I think, abundant evidence that the total mass of reading matter presented to children in school is far from appetizing. To a large extent it is both tasteless and indigestible.

First among the offenders are the texts and manuals of the other school subjects — spelling, arithmetic, grammar, language, history, geography, etc. That the youngster spends most of his day reading these materials is a fact that must not be overlooked in searching for causes of boredom from reading. Many studies have shown the composition, vocabulary and conceptual content of these books to be complex and difficult. For example, Dr. Lazar found that about 35 per cent of the pupils in grades four to six said they positively disliked one or more of these subjects and over 90 per cent of these dislikes were said by the pupils to be due to the fact that they were "too hard." The rereading and analysis of arithmetic problems, spelling directions

and the like are the most fatiguing forms of reading. After hours of these difficult types of reading in school, a child's disinclination to read any more, even material of high intrinsic appeal, can be readily understood. It is my opinion that the vast amount of difficulty and tedious application to such materials is the primary cause of reducing zeal for reading. In Dr. Lazar's study of "dislikes" reported for the various school subjects, reading was mentioned only one time in twenty; geography and arithmetic were disliked six times as often; language and composition about three times as often. Consequently, reforms in the teaching of these subjects, happily now under way in many places, would be a necessary step in the movement to give reading a chance to secure and retain its intrinsic charm in intellectual and recreational life.

Although the content of courses in reading and literature is far superior in intrinsic interest and technical suitability to that of the typical subject, it is not wholly free of deficiencies. In the lower grades, the extreme difficulty of the material in the basal and supplementary readers in vocabulary burden and other respects was pointed out around 1920. Primary grade readers now contain more interesting and varied materials, written with about half the vocabulary burden used in 1920. In the intermediate grades less satisfactory progress has been made, and still less at the high school level.

Irion, studying comprehension of the selections most commonly used in the ninth grade in New York State schools in 1925, found that more than half of the pupils were utterly confounded by the vocabulary and general concepts in the material. Dr. Dora V. Smith, after investigating schools in the same state in 1938, vividly reports similar difficulties

in a program largely the same as that prevailing twenty years earlier.

Much of the material, especially in the upper grades and the high school, is unsuitable in two respects. It is altogether too difficult. It is also unsuitable in substance; it would capture little interest even if it could be understood. It is literature suitable not for boys and girls with I.Q.s from 80 to 110—a range including about 80 per cent of those struggling with it; not for adults within this range of intellect; not indeed for the typical adult of higher intelligence, even those who are graduates of Yale and Vassar, but for a select list of literary specialists. It was about 50 years ago when a group of such specialists selected a list of classics judged to be good for youth in school. They were profoundly wrong in their judgment, but amazingly potent in their ability to secure followers to support their errors for a half century. Some of their disciples, even now, are so convinced of the infallibility of this classical tradition that they would rather throw two-thirds of the pupils out of school than toss two-thirds of the chosen classics out of the course of study. I am convinced, however, that this doughty group, clasping the *Atlantic Monthly* to their breasts as shields, are soon to be put to rout.

My belief on this point is supported by observations of the reactions observed in New York City classrooms with materials prepared by the W.P.A. Writers Project. These writers consist largely of persons who previously had written for the newspapers and magazines. Under the immediate supervision of Miss Rose Henderson, who revealed a fine understanding of the real interests of boys and girls, they agreed to follow a simple formula. They would write with very few words outside of a list of about 1800 very com-

mon ones. They would avoid complex and clumsy structure. They would forget classical standards on the one hand and pulp appeals on the other. They would exercise good taste and respect common sense. They would try to inform, amuse and entertain young people as they are. They would endeavor to write literature of all respectable types suitable in content for the upper grades, at a third grade level of difficulty. They have produced nearly a hundred booklets under this formula with illustrations drawn by W.P.A. artists. The following list of titles illustrates the range of literary types produced:

Tom Coe, Pirate
Pao and His Pets
The Story of an Ant Colony
Buckaroo Rhymes
The Little Newspaper Man
Tommy and Tugboat George
Coffee, Tea and Chocolate
Chinese Caravan
Road Fellows and Other Poems.

These books were put to the acid test of student criticism both during the making and after publication. I wish I could read you many of the scores of reports by teachers and pupils on these books. Here is a sample written by a principal which shows that interest covers a wide range of grades:

We tried them out in classes of 3-A, 6-B and 9-A (slow readers) grade. The 6-B and 9-A pupils were deeply interested in them. In fact, these classes put in a unanimous and enthusiastic request that these books be substituted for the regular grade materials. Some of these books swept the pupils' interests into a burning flame.

The fifth grade teacher of a slow group reports:

The children were very enthusiastic about these stories. They were reluctant to stop reading. The subjects were interesting and

within the comprehension of the children. The pictures held them spellbound. The children read these stories clearly and expressively because they were so interested in them. One boy went home, following the reading of these stories, and returned the next day with an illustration for each story read.

The children pleaded for more stories like the ones they had read. They suggested other types of stories they would like the ladies to bring the next time they came, i.e., pirate stories, girls' stories, Indian stories, etc.

We certainly would like to have more stories of this type. In fact, the absence of such stories has been one of the difficulties in the reading situation which we have found it impossible to overcome.

The teacher of a class of rebellious ninth grade pupils (mostly boys) writes:

All year I have struggled to whip up interest in the books on our list, but with little result. The boys do not care for these selections. They cannot or will not read them without pressure. After Mr.—told the class about the W.P.A. Writers' work in preparing the books, I passed a number around and told them to choose the ones they wanted. Before ten minutes everyone was reading with an intentness that still leaves me stunned. Even B—and L—, whom I considered hopelessly incapable of sustained reading, seemed engrossed. When B—, who reads very slowly, stayed at his desk during forty minutes of the lunch hour to finish his story, my astonishment knew no bounds. When L— returned before one o'clock with many others to read another book, I quoted under my breath, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dream't of in your philosophy."

Experiences such as these indicate the general fact that reading can be made an engrossing and educative activity. They

also suggest certain specific requirements of content, as follows:

1. Boys and girls must be supplied with an abundance of material which they can read with the ease that you and I read *Gone with the Wind*, *The New York Times*, or the *Saturday Evening Post*. Half the pupils in the first six grades get very, very little of this type of reading.

2. Boys and girls must be generously supplied with material which is intrinsically interesting. Their interests are really very wide. They are vitally interested in the lives and activities of youth of their age. Of course, they like reports of heroism, achievement, success, glamour, adventure, physical prowess. As a maiden must be idealized to be wanted as a "best girl," so their literature must, in considerable measure, be a somewhat glorified version of their own lives. This is not to say that youth can sustain interest only in unreality or that their reading must always provide release from real life. Like the typical adult, they can and do like to read about life straight and undiluted, but they also like it to take the unexpected turns that make one laugh or weep or marvel or tingle with excitement. On their own level they love the equivalent of *Anthony Adverse*, *Gone With the Wind*, *With Malice Toward Some*, and *Rebecca*, but they also take to the equivalent of *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Country Lawyer*, *Mathematics for the Million*, *Inside Asia*, or *Middletown*.

In this connection, two trends should be noted, one of which is probably on the wane and one on the increase. On the wane is what may be called the *milk toast* tradition in children's writing. Anyone who has examined the "trade" literature for children during the past few decades must be struck by the immense amount of writing of the "sweetness and

light" type. The typical character of such literature always comes to my mind as a gentle elderly maiden in lace and lavender, devoted to her wise cat and distilling sweet virtues to all who come near. Among those who will not come near, at least not often, are most of the boys and girls I know.

A second trend, apparently on the gain, is that of making the content of the program in reading and literature subordinate to the social studies. In some schools this tendency has reached a point where a pupil will almost feel guilty of treason if he is caught reading anything but treatises which are obviously concerned with saving Democracy and reforming the social order, or which, as Dr. Dora Smith puts it, are not "about the fire engine, the creamery, the Indians, the Pilgrims and the Dutch." To my mind, the school has no clearer obligation than that of opening up for free exploration the many different fields of literature for children at successive stages of growth unless it is its obligation to encourage writers to enrich and broaden these fields and keep them up to date.

By what has been said, there is no intent to minimize the merits of aged literary classics or the modern literature of the social and other sciences or even the writings of the *milk toast* school. What is urged is that these materials should form only a proper part of the diet. Much of it, especially the classics, should not be fed to boys and girls until they learn to like it and are capable of digesting it. Much of it—to change to analogy—is beyond the grasp of pupils when it is taught. In the first grade, the concept of readiness has recently justified its value. According to this idea, learning to read is beyond the ability of many pupils on entering school. The teacher, therefore, proceeds to develop step-by-

step the abilities and interests which constitute readiness. By a similar procedure, in later grades, the teacher should begin with the interests and abilities which pupils possess at the time and move forward step by step to higher levels.

Teaching methods as well as materials have an influence on reading interests and habits. The main fault in teaching today, I believe, is excess. It is necessary to have some sort of basal program of instruction to develop skills essential for efficient reading. Newer methods enable teachers to accomplish this purpose in less time and with richer concomitants than ever before. These methods require incentives for and checks upon speed, accuracy, fullness of understanding and validity of interpretation. Such analytic work is necessary but a small amount is sufficient. Only a fraction of the total time spent in reading should be devoted to this type of instruction, leaving several fold as much time for normal, undisturbed reading of literature.

A common mistake is to insist on the same or a similar type of teaching, employing supervision, recitation, comprehension exercises, discussion of issues, outlining, summarizing or whatnot in all or nearly all reading activities. This zeal to teach and test defeats its own purpose. Any normal adult would throw all his books and magazines out of the window and stalk off to the movies in a huff if he were repeatedly asked to spend his evenings reading his books and magazines for the purpose of answering certain questions asked in advance, or if after completing each article or chapter, he had to record his speed, take a series of comprehension exercises, write a summary or review, or tell what parts he liked best and why. Among my friends are a number of persons, including some authors of fiction, who read widely for

the fun of it. When a visitor in a group of these mentions a book and asks for such responses, I have observed but one expression on their faces—an expression of deep anguish. Even in their lives, generous provision is made for wholly private reading for the jolly good fun of it. What they think about it before, during and after is nobody's business and to insist on inquisition is not only to violate one's privacy, it is also to interfere with one's recreational freedom. I have joined with several persons of my acquaintance in refusing to read, for purposes of writing a review, any book I really want to read. It half spoils my enjoyment of a book to read with the realization that I must write or say something about it, even what I like or dislike, when I am through. This may be childish; in fact, I believe that is exactly what it is, and it bids me advise that children be left alone to read as they will without the cloud of irksome anticipation floating through their minds.

What has been said may lead some of you to inquire: "Well, is there any job at all for a teacher of reading and literature?" My answer is that there is less need for most of the simple, easy rule of thumb tasks, but very great need of a larger amount of much more difficult and subtle services, of which the following are the most important requirements:

1. The teacher should know intimately the substance, difficulty and other characteristics of hundreds of books and magazine articles for children and become familiar with new ones as they are published. Since every grade includes a wide range of reading ability, she must know the material for practically all grades from two to twelve. This task is a very extensive one and it requires great sagacity as well as much time.

2. The teacher should know the reading interests and abilities of her pupils so well that she can give each wise guidance in locating the works that will be most interesting and educative for them. This assignment also requires much time spent in getting acquainted with all aspects of the life and activities of each pupil and it requires also very great psychological insight.

3. The teacher should be capable of arranging the conditions, giving the suggestions, and organizing the projects which will stimulate and sustain the pupil's desire to read. The traditional scheme of assigning readings, and trying to stir up interest by asking questions and talking about the selections in the class periods is a ridiculously naive oversimplification of the teaching process.

4. The teacher should be able to maneuver into operation various enterprises which give the pupils opportunity to express themselves concerning their reading if they wish to do so, and to make fruitful use of what they have read. Here again, telling what they like or dislike, answering comprehension questions, explaining words, phrases or lines, writing reviews, etc., are quite unsatisfactory formal rules of thumb.

All these services must be achieved with such tact and skill that they never have the chilling effect of an assignment or order or interference or inquisition or pointless busy-work. To enrich and enliven literature for a boy or girl without disturbing the free spirit of a recreational enterprise is a difficult and subtle art. I feel frankly that if a teacher cannot do so, he had better do nothing at all except to suggest suitable books and leave the youngster alone with them. To do this well, I assure you, is a big achievement requiring extensive time and talent. To

Growth of Interest and Appreciation in Reading*

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WHEN THE TOPIC of this paper was selected, it was conceived as a prologue rather than an epilogue to the afternoon's discussion. I concur, therefore, in any question which you may raise concerning the appropriateness of an historical survey at the conclusion of this otherwise very stimulating program. As a compromise, I shall abbreviate the report as originally planned, directing attention chiefly to growth in recognition of interest and appreciation, as applied to children's books and school readers. In concluding the discussion, I shall emphasize certain problems which we face if interest and appreciation in reading receive due recognition in the future.

The boys and girls of this generation are fortunate indeed as compared with those of earlier times in respect to the reading materials provided for them. Failure to recognize their interests and preferences until quite recently is strikingly illustrated in the field of children's literature. In the fourteenth century boys and girls had little or nothing to read excepting the thrilling episodes characteristic of a Latin grammar. In the fifteenth century, such material was supplemented by a limited number of essays on manners and morals, with emphasis on court etiquette, for boys who were preparing to become pages and squires. Little was added during the sixteenth century excepting an occasional book or essay addressed to children "to remove

them from vice and to make them follow virtue."

The seventeenth century is characterized by the publication of so-called "good godly books" which aimed chiefly to inculcate the Puritan conception of life. As pointed out by several commentators "sad eyed children read sadder books." One of the most famous books of the period was Janeway's "A Token for Children, Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives, and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children, To Which is Added Prayers and Graces, Fitted for the Use of Young Children." It was illustrated by woodcuts showing children praying for their parents or contemplating a corpse in a coffin. During the latter part of the seventeenth century fairy tales and folk tales made their appearance, not so much to please children as to entertain members of the King's court.

The eighteenth century witnessed a rapid increase in the publication of books read by children. A large majority were known as chapbooks which were little stitched pamphlets or tracts written for the common people and distributed throughout England, Scotland, and the American colonies by pedlars or itinerant dealers. They consisted largely, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, of vulgarized versions of popular stories such as "Tom Thumb," "Jack the Giant Killer," and "Reynard the Fox"; they included also stories of travel, biography, and religious treatises. From a sociological

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point of view they provide illuminating illustrations of seventeenth century life. One of the outcomes of this period was three famous books that are still read today, namely *Gulliver's Travels*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Robinson Crusoe*. But since they were not written for children they should not be thought of as concessions to children's interests.

In harmony with the facts presented thus far, literature merely for children may be said scarcely to have begun before the middle of the eighteenth century. "Indeed the interest in childhood seems, as reflected in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to have been either non-existent or totally different from what it is now. Children were of interest, not for themselves, but only because they would become men and women later. Hence much of the teaching addressed to them, in books at least, regards them as small men and women. Even Shakespeare, whose range of view was so broad seldom makes use of love of children as a motive."¹ His children were precocious and priggish, for example, a child playing at being a man.

About the middle of the eighteenth century significant changes were initiated by John Newbery. He was an editor and publisher of note who became keenly interested in the kinds of books that might be prepared for children. He believed in little, gay, and childish books, and devoted much time to the preparation of books whose covers were attractive and whose content was interesting. But Newbery's views were not widely adopted at once. For many decades the writings for children were priggish and aimed chiefly to cultivate various virtues as indicated by such titles as "The Fall of Pride," "Lessons in Wisdom," "Lazy

Lawrence," and "The Swearer's End." Some concession to children's interests, however, was made by illustrating books with paper dolls with which the reader might play, and by hand colored illustrations.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the movement to develop interesting reading material for children was well under way. It was greatly influenced by the views of such educational reformers as Rousseau, Basedow, Comenius, Froebel, and Pestalozzi. The interest aroused by them in the child as an object of vital concern proved so strong that the nineteenth century saw the birth of well-nigh universal interest in child study. In Germany, Preyer's *The Mind of the Child* was one of the early manifestations of this interest, and in England, Darwin's extended observations of early child life gave added impetus to the movement. It remained, however, for G. Stanley Hall to broaden the scope of the field and to make child study the popular subject that it is today both here and abroad.

Another significant influence was the interest of recognized writers in developing books for children of superior quality. During the middle of the nineteenth century a series of children's books of recognized literary merit were published, such as Andersen's *Fairy Tales*, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Alcott's *Little Women*, and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*. The popularity of these books inspired writers, good and poor, to produce books that children would devour. As a result there followed a period of great freedom in which writers went the whole way in giving children what they wanted to read. One of the products of this period was a flood of serials of which the *Alger*, *Elsie*, and *Henty* books are representatives. The eagerness with which such books were

¹ Monroe's *Encyclopedia of Education*.

read supplied convincing evidence that there was a large potential demand among children for interesting reading material. As a result the publication of children's books has continued until the present at a constantly increasing rate.

Since the turn of the century, several developments have occurred which have greatly influenced the character of the books provided for children. One of these was a direct outgrowth of the child study movement and made use of objective methods of securing facts. It was concerned with the nature of children's interests in reading, the kinds of books which they read, and the factors which influence their preferences. The results of more than two hundred such studies have already been published. They provide an illuminating body of information that is exerting a wholesome influence not only in identifying the kinds of books that should be written but also in selecting books that will appeal to children at different grade and ability levels.

Of equal importance has been the effort to increase the attractiveness, readability and literary quality of the books prepared. Objective studies have been made of the physical characteristics of books that are most attractive to children, the kind of pictures that are most interesting and the elements of style which make for ease or difficulty in comprehension. In addition, the Newbery Medal Award has been created and such agencies as the Junior Literary Guild have been organized to stimulate the production of reading materials that not only appeal strongly to children but are artistically written. Furthermore, specialists in children's books have been added to the trade book staff of publishing companies to aid in the selection and editing of manuscripts for publication. Indeed, various steps have been

taken to develop a real profession of writing and preparing books for children that recognize their interests and preferences.

As the quality of children's books has been improved, vigorous effort has been made by teachers and librarians to stimulate wide reading, to broaden interests, and to cultivate increasing preference for material that is artistically written. To these ends various steps have been taken: classroom libraries have been organized; school librarians have been trained; book weeks have been established; standards for use in selecting books to read have been developed; free reading periods have been organized; and various types of guidance provided. Experiments indicate that many of these measures are very effective in influencing both the amount and character of the reading that is done.

But some of the efforts to provide better books for children and to modify interests, preferences and tastes are not without serious limitations or dangers. One is that in the very attempt to provide quality books, the interests and preferences of children may be neglected or forgotten. For example, E. B. White in the January, 1939, number of *Harper's Magazine* emphasized the fact that competition among children's writers often leads them far away from the lives and interests of children. Furthermore, the restriction of free reading to approved lists often prevents the child from satisfying desirable curiosities and interests that are real and compelling. In other words evidence is beginning to appear which indicates that we may be entering a new period in which adult interests and preferences will again be imposed on children to a questionable extent.

The foregoing statements may be supplemented to advantage by certain facts

relating to the development of school readers. With but rare exceptions little recognition was given in their preparation to the interests and preferences of children prior to 1850. The selections related chiefly to the motives, aspirations, and problems of adults with which youth, it was assumed, should become familiar. By 1860, however, readers were published which had a goodly sprinkling of stories for children although a large majority of them were still didactic and moralistic. It appeared for the time being that readers might reflect the same liberal trend in recognizing children's interests that characterized the trade books of the seventies, eighties, and nineties. In the conflict which ensued, however, the literary ideal gained supremacy and dominated the content of readers until 1910 or later.

The chief function of teachers of reading, as conceived during that period, is well illustrated by the following statements made before the National Education Association in 1888: "The mere ability to read, with no growing desire for the best in literature, is of questionable benefit. There is a distinct educational duty in training young people to the intelligent reading of worthy books and in developing an earnest purpose to study them." In commenting on the character of the class exercises in reading the speaker said, "There will be little dissent from the statement that the productions selected should be classics, should have those distinctive and pre-eminent merits of style which lift the masterpiece above the common-place work"². There is little evidence here of any recognition of the reader's interests or preferences either in teaching him to read or in cultivating appreciations and tastes.

By 1900 specialists in reading and literature began to question seriously the

wisdom of attempting to establish basic reading habits and to cultivate appreciations and tastes in literature through the use of the same material. Experience showed clearly that the use of classics in teaching pupils to read presented so many difficulties that pupils often made little or no progress in learning to read. Furthermore, they lacked interest and motive which are essential to successful endeavor. Of equal importance was the conclusion that appreciations and tastes for good literature could be cultivated best during periods when the teacher and pupils were free to devote themselves exclusively to that purpose. As a result, reading and literature periods were gradually differentiated and the way paved for the development of readers based upon the dominant interests of boys and girls.

Progress in this direction was slow at first and the literary quality of the material open to serious criticism. This statement applies particularly to some of the reading material published between 1915 and 1925. The last decade may be characterized as one of the unprecedented efforts to develop readers that are based on the dominant interests of children, that are attractive and well illustrated, and that show marked progress in respect to literary quality. The fact is widely recognized, however, that existing materials fall far short of the ideal in each of these respects. The need is urgent for a clearer understanding of the interests, curiosities, motives, and drives of children and of the various personal and environmental factors that influence their preferences. It is hoped that the current emphasis on child growth and development and on all aspects of personality may result in genuine contributions in this connection. The need is urgent also for the development of writers of children's literature who have a broad understanding of child nature, who can identify

² *Addresses and Proceedings of the National Education Association*, 1888, p. 71.

themes of vital interest to children, and who are able to prepare material that is simple but artistically written.

The facts presented thus far show clearly that radical changes have occurred during recent years on which future developments must be based. For example, notable progress has been made in the preparation of books that recognize children's interests and preferences. The problem of teaching pupils to read has been clearly differentiated from the traditional effort to cultivate appreciation for classic literature. The materials included in readers are increasingly of such quality that they tend by their very nature to cultivate a preference for artistic forms of writing. The books and magazines available for free reading vary widely in interest appeal, attractiveness, readability, and literary quality.

In the light of these conditions what are the classroom problems which we face today if interest and appreciation receive in the future the emphasis they merit? Time will permit reference to only three of them. In the first place, vigorous programs of pre-service and in-service training are essential which will acquaint teachers far more fully than at present with the general nature, interests, and drives of children and with all of the factors and conditions that influence their development. Of even greater importance is the fact that teachers should become continuous students of the characteristics, interests, and needs of their pupils and should grow steadily in their ability to identify significant items in the present lives of children and the resources that can promote further growth.

The second need is wider familiarity among teachers with children's literature. Many of the best books now available have been published relatively recently. Unless teachers in service have had an unusual background in this field and have kept in touch with recent developments, they are seriously handicapped in their effort to provide books which will satisfy the interests and curiosities of children and which will exert a wholesome influence on their tastes and preferences. Fortunate indeed is the child who comes under the influence of a teacher who is fond of children's literature, who is broadly familiar with the materials that are available, and who has the capacity to guide and direct pupils in stimulating explorations in this field.

The third problem grows out of the fact that the appreciations and tastes of children, as revealed by numerous recent studies, remain at a disappointingly low level. One explanation may be that we have set our standards too high and are impatient with the normal trend of development. A second explanation lies in the fact that amid the numerous changes of the last decade we have neglected to give adequate attention to the cultivation of appreciation and tastes in reading. Certainly deliberate studies of this problem are essential. As desirable outcomes, we should learn better than we know at present how to utilize the interests and preferences of children in planning reading activities and at the same time raise their appreciations and tastes to constantly higher levels.

Preventing Reading Failures Before First Grade Entrance

BERNICE FACTOR

*Play School for Habit Training
Boston, Massachusetts*

FOR THE PAST eight years, the Play School for Habit Training, in Boston, has included in its regular program the grading of each child in the group through mental tests. Both the Binet and Merrill Palmer Tests were administered by a trained psychologist. A summarization of these tests showed I. Q.'s ranging from 100-140, indicating an exceptionally high average of intelligence, which average was far above the general district rating based on public school achievement tests. This discrepancy between potential ability and actual learning was so great that the director of the Play School for Habit Training began to try to determine its cause.

Since the task of the School, the retraining of emotionally unstable children, cannot be complete after one or two years of concentrated work with an individual child, the School has always kept close contact between itself and its former pupils, acting as advisor and guide all along the path, from preschool years to adolescence, and in many cases even afterwards, in an effort to maintain, through help and suggestion, the use of wholesome behavior patterns which had been substituted for unwholesome ones in the earliest years.

Because of this prolonged interest and attention, much valuable data had been gathered over a period of years. This material was now utilized in an effort to work out on an individual basis the cause of the previously mentioned discrepancy between ability and learning. Emotional

instability was not overlooked, but was considered an equalizing factor, which lowers both the measure of ability as well as the measure of achievement; a factor which tends to lower learning rates and precipitate failure, but not the unknown factor which was being sought.

The first step was to check on the validity of preschool I. Q.'s. This was done by an extended testing program, in which former pupils of the school were retested. Thirty graduates were chosen at random, a few from each grade, from the first through junior high school. When the resultant scores were compared with previous preschool ratings, differences were found to be negligible. The first conclusion to be drawn from the study, then, was the fact that the difference between prediction of achievement in preschool years and later school ratings was not due to error or change in the degree of mental ability as previously measured.

A further study of school records was then undertaken, in an effort to discover possible causes of failure by locating special subjects in which the preponderance of failures had occurred. This study revealed a common and significant weakness, failure in learning to read. Nor were these failures confined to the less able children; they occurred impartially throughout the group.

Here, undoubtedly, lay the crux of the problem. It is inevitable since the public school curriculum is based almost entirely on language and comprehension of the

printed page, that a child who cannot read easily will be retarded, branded a failure, and subjected to those social and emotional upheavals which inevitably accompany such a stigma. There can be no minimizing of the drastic effect of school failure on children. Failure, with its accompanying aura of disapproval, is one of the recognized causes contributing directly to juvenile delinquency. An unsuccessful child, defeated in socially acceptable situations such as school achievement presents, finds his necessary satisfactions in unsocial behavior. Psychological research has served to uphold the old maxim, "nothing succeeds like success." Add to this normally essential desire for recognition and attention a high mentality, with a tendency towards emotional instability, confine the resultant dynamic personality to a congested and meagre environment, such as the North End of Boston, and there arises a situation with far-reaching consequences which cannot be ignored.

In order to cope with this problem, and reduce the percentage of failure in future groups to a minimum, it was decided to add a pre-reading group to the Play School for Habit Training, which had formerly included an age range of two to four years. The group would now include four and five-year-olds before they entered first grade.

Preventive work for this group was divided into three classifications. First, there was to be a continuation of the correction of emotional and physical handicaps which would interfere with learning in general. Second, correlated with this part of the program would be the detection and correction of defects which would interfere specifically with learning to read, such as poor vision, deafness, inferior muscular co-ordination, and mixed eye-hand dominance. Third,

there would be highly specialized teaching, centering constantly around the problem of language and language expression, as well as around the cultivation of certain skills known to have a high correlation with reading ability, i.e., matching, reproduction of symbols from visual memory, reproduction of symbols from auditory memory, auditory accuracy, and close eye-hand ear-hand co-ordination.

The diagnostic work was carried on through a battery of mental tests, and the Munroe Reading Aptitude Tests. Children whose scores showed a marked discrepancy between mental age and reading aptitude were checked for physical defects in the out-patient department of the Massachusetts General Hospital, in order that possible physical defects might be corrected before reading began. In addition, past school records were consulted, and conferences held with the director, so that habit training and emotional growth might be consistent with what had been accomplished at the two and three-year levels. Patient reiteration of the values of regular sleeping and eating routines persisted hand in hand with individual guidance and treatment for food fussers, over-dependent, excessively shy, and disagreeably precocious children. A teaching program was planned which would fulfill both individual and group needs.

Since vocabulary and informational tests showed a dearth of knowledge and information, enrichment of background through experiences closely allied with future reading materials was the next step. Because there is no one reading method in use in the Boston public schools, it became necessary to compile a list of reading concepts common to all primary reading materials, each concept having its own descriptive vocabulary. For this purpose, a scientifically compiled

study, *A Reading Vocabulary for the Primary Grades*, Columbia Teachers College Bureau of Publications, edited by Arthur I. Gates, was used. The following concepts were finally recognized.

1. Home and family
2. Community
3. Transportation
4. Safety and health
5. School
6. Holidays and special occasions
7. Animals and animal life
8. Farm, field, and garden
9. Birds and bird life
10. Natural phenomena

It was then possible to plan for systematic development of ideas which would not only interest the children, but which would also furnish them with the exact information necessary for comprehension of future reading materials. All the children needed to have their knowledge and information increased through a variety of devices, experiences, discussions, and books. They were badly handicapped by the limitations of environment due to financial conditions, parents too busy or uninformed to answer questions or take them to places of interest, and a complete ignorance of the possibilities which even their limited neighborhood offered. *In this group of eight children, only one child had ever walked to the nearby waterfront, within five blocks, to stand on the bridge, or watch the boats!*

From a wide list of subjects about which the group possessed little or no information, only those topics which were closely related to future reading materials were included in the teaching program. It was then possible to develop concepts which lay within the field of child interest, but which would also bring meaning to specific future reading because of close association with reading subject matter. For example, before Valentine's Day, when the children's in-

terest in valentines was at its peak, this interest was used to add a new and much less familiar experience to the meagre supply. The children had been making valentines for all their friends and relatives, gaining in verbal expression by creating appropriate sentiments for their valentines, growing in eye-hand co-ordination through the use of hand skills, and increasing their powers of matching by copying, with the typewriter, names and addresses printed for them. At the daily class meeting, where discussion is encouraged and problems arise for group solution, the question of how to deliver the valentines arose. Naturally the postman was the answer. The next day, the group visited the post office in a body. Here, each bought his own stamps and mailed his own letters. The children were then guided through the inner door, to see what happened to their valentines. They watched the complete process from the time the valentines were collected from the wire baskets, until they finally rested, with stamps cancelled, in the pigeon-holes with the various street names on them. Excitement ran high the next day as each reported the ultimate delivery to his very own door. When these children meet the postman next year, in the pages of the first grade primer, he will be a real and meaningful figure, not a vaguely familiar fellow in some kind of a uniform.

Back in the classroom, they re-created the experience in song, story, play, and art materials, until it became an integral part of them. In this way, the simple valentine concept, with its limited vocabulary became the stimulus for an experience which developed the postman concept, with its larger vocabulary, which concept, in turn, paved the way for countless other community experiences. Of these, the experiences which established

concepts directly related to the transportation vocabulary are most interesting, because of their development from the post office.

During a group discussion related to the post office, a list was made of the various ways by which letters travel. A walk to the North Station, where mail was being loaded on a train, brought to mind the sacks which had been noted in the post office, and served as a further stimulus to classroom discussion and activity. After a few days, an effort was made, by means of pictures and conversation, to lead the group interest to the subject of transportation by boat. Several walks along the waterfront, observation of water traffic from the drawbridge, and a short ferry-boat ride stimulated further interest and discussion. A class trip to the library supplemented and enriched these experiences with story and picture books directly related to the new interests. Because of a general disbelief in boats large enough for people to sleep and eat on, the group next visited the Eastern Steamship Line docks. Here, with an official guide, they inspected the wonderful New York boat from boiler room to pilot's cabin. They tested the beds, had a make-believe dinner in the dining-room, and even a turn each at the wheel. They watched cargo being unloaded from the hold.

The way letters travel was now of little importance compared to the all-absorbing interest of how people travel: consequently, the next trip was one to the airport at East Boston. Here each child had an opportunity to take the stick on the army weather plane while the rest watched the wings move. Next, they visited the American Airways hangar, where they observed, at their leisure, a huge transport plane. They were then permitted to board one just like it, try

out the seats, meet the stewardess and pilots, and watch the plane taxi over to the field in front of the waiting-room, where passengers boarded it and mail was taken on for the trip to New York.

All these experiences took place over a period of about six weeks. During this time, blocks were at a premium as the children relived in construction and dramatic play the experiences which had opened new worlds to them. No realistic detail was omitted as they bought tickets in their self-constructed "office," walked carefully up the gang-plank or up the portable steps, and settled themselves to tomato juice served either in the dining-room or in the cabin. Song, rhythm, and story periods echoed to the toots of tugs, the chugs of trains, the whirl of wings, as they created songs, stories, and new dramatic plays, all the material for which came from their new fund of experiences. A check-test at the end revealed an amazing increase in comprehension of the vocabulary related to transportation, a vocabulary which had formerly been limited to city traffic, encompassing only familiar words such as car, conductor, auto, horn, honk, had now expanded to include such words as row, river, lake, pond, canoe, ocean, sea, salt, shore, land, sand, beach, ship, sail, sailor, captain, bridge, rudder, engine, track, journey, mile, visit, suitcase, trunk, New York, state, city, town, country, and many more closely related words, all of which were in constant use for the first time, and associated with pleasurable experiences. Associative memory will function more effectively when these same words are encountered in first-grade readers, to the end that learning will be easier.

Two-thirds of the group reported at varied intervals that they had re-experienced, with some adult member of the family, one or more of the previous

group experiences. The young child of the family was the one to indicate to the adult, accessible and interesting opportunities for self-education through experience. In this way, the group has helped to expand the limited horizons of entire families. Since data culled subsequently from Reading Aptitude Tests, individually administered, proved conclusively that limited environment, and not a foreign language handicap, was largely responsible for the lack of readiness for reading in this group, the most significant and satisfactory outcome of our transportation experiences was the carry-over, into the home, of the desire to explore!

While that part of the program which centered directly around the acquisition of a great variety of information was emphasized, general development along the lines of muscular co-ordination was not neglected. Recent psychological and medical research have brought to light several important factors which are invaluable aids in the detection and prevention of difficulties which block the "learning to read" process. Of these, the most vital from the standpoint of "reading readiness" are the findings which establish the close relationship and integration of speech and motor areas in the brain. Because of this interrelationship, interference with proper motor development in the child interferes directly with speech and language development. Translated into terms of teaching, these facts mean that development of muscular co-ordination and control goes hand in hand with development of skill in the use of language. Consequently, great emphasis is placed on muscle co-ordination, the discovery of the proper and natural hand-dominance of individual children, and the necessity for non-interference with

the handedness inclination, because of the resultant blocking of proper language development.

In addition to the acquisition of skills due to the constant effective manipulation of materials such as clay, paint, blocks, wood, crayons, and paper, the development of certain specific skills was encouraged. Open shelves were loaded with a variety of matching games, from simple sets of duplicate pictures and letters, to more complicated puzzles and picture lottos. Blackboard games in which the children were called to reproduce from memory symbols and combinations of symbols which were first shown, then erased, served to develop visual memory in connection with the eye-hand movements used in drawing these symbols. Chalk marking in rhythm, as an accompaniment to the piano, gave special training in ear-eye-hand co-ordination. Tracing paths through mazes developed further skill in eye-hand movement. Group games that varied in complexity from the simple repetition of two or three words to the execution of complex commands, served to develop auditory memory. So ear and eye were trained to longer memory spans, while the movements which accompanied each game made for increased muscular co-ordination. These games and devices served the double purpose of increasing language power through increased muscular co-ordination, and increasing specific skills directly related to reading. Matching of pictures leads to word matching, visual memory to word memory, auditory memory to better enunciation and pronunciation, as well as to better behavior and better adjustment to the school situation. Many children are branded as disobedient when they simply cannot remember what they have been asked to do. They have never learned to use their ears.

Signs on the Reading Highway

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THE ABILITY to read is so indispensable a skill in our civilization that we can hardly imagine life without it. For all our enlarged and enriched curriculum it is as necessary to the child of to-day as to the small scholar of two centuries ago, poring over his horn-book. Fortunately for the modern child, research and experiment have made both the material to be read and the methods of teaching it much pleasanter and more efficient than those by which his ancestor struggled to master this most fundamental of the three R's.

One of the most important developments of this research is the recognition of individual variations in reading readiness, depending upon the child's maturity and background. Teachers no longer plunge their entire class of beginners into reading, herding them through a set number of pages to be mastered in a stipulated period. Instead they furnish a transitional period in which the children are accustomed to their new environment and supplied with various incentives to wish to read as well as incidental opportunities for easy reading.

The first important factor in the little child's reading readiness is the position that books and reading in general have held in his home. If he knows that books are important to his parents, if they evidently enjoy reading and build a cultural life about it, he will take for granted that for himself, too, reading is going to be a necessary part of life. If his parents have responded to his demands for information and stories, have read to him and taught him verse from Mother Goose

and other children's classics, he will arrive at the kindergarten with his interest in books already implanted and needing only direction and encouragement from the teacher. The emotional and cultural atmosphere of the home is also valuable in maturing the child's vocabulary and sentence structure in daily speech, an important factor in his readiness for the reading program presented in school.

Although actual reading does not begin with the child's entrance in kindergarten, the teacher should supply many suggestions and associations conducive to reading readiness. The very atmosphere of the kindergarten room is important. At the outset of the term and throughout the year there should be a library table well furnished with books on such subjects as travel, transportation, pets, and family life, as well as Mother Goose and other familiar favorites. These should be sufficiently attractive in format and illustration as to interest the child even before he can make anything of the text. The library table should stand in a secluded part of the room, where the light is suitable for reading. In short, all the experiences associated with books should be pleasurable, and the children should feel the restfulness and quiet freedom typical of browsing among books. For this purpose the books must be easily accessible and of a size easily manageable in children's hands; for some of the larger books reading racks may be provided, so that paging through them is not wearisome.

An additional pleasure to be derived from the volumes on the library table is

hearing the teacher read the text aloud. Frequently she will let the children make their own choice, based on their interest in the pictures or their recollection of stories that they have already heard. Among the works most effective for small children are Lois Lenski's *The Family; Told Under the Blue Umbrella*,¹ and *Little Black Sambo* by Helen Banner-man. The teacher should set aside some time for reading every day and should use additional opportunities for reading as they seem desirable. A special activity may call for additional connected reading. Each holiday is, of course, rich in stories and poems.

Since real fluency and ease in speech are necessary in reading readiness, the teacher takes every means to cultivate these abilities in the children. She encourages them to tell of the their interests at home and to make up little original accounts of school activities. They tell in their own words the stories she has read to them. They learn rhymes from Mother Goose and other collections of children's verse in order to develop both ease of enunciation and an ear for phrasing and rhythm. At times they dramatize stories that they have heard or episodes based on their own experiences. The conversation arising from such activities as their playhouse and grocery store also promotes fluency of expression.

The teacher also makes use of various visual devices to carry the children through the transitional period during which reading readiness is developed. The children come to know that phrases of a certain length and general form are representative of statements about their activities even though they do not truly read these phrases. The fact that children are conscious of predications as complete structures and do not analyze them into

separate units is the psychological basis for the modern method of teaching reading by the "whole method" and its superiority over the old way of teaching by separate words unrelated to context.

Even in the kindergarten, then, the materials for the children's activities bear labels—"These are our goldfish," "We keep our blocks in this cupboard." The children memorize these statements and know the wording of each sign. They know, too, the legends that the teacher has lettered for their pictorial posters.

Each activity is commemorated with a record book. The kindergarten class will wish to make a book about their Halloween party. On one page they paste a gay Jack-o'-lantern under which the teacher prints "We sent an invitation to the first grade." Though the children cannot actually read this statement, they know what it is and that it is explanatory of their activity to those that can read. On another page they paste a napkin above "We have made napkins for our party." Under a plate is "We have made plates for our party." Other pages record the entertainment for the party. The children will delight in referring to this book time and again and will know the wording that belongs on each page. Throughout the year the activities of the playhouse, the doll clinic, the grocery store, and the science table will furnish material for similar record books. For Thanksgiving the children will make "Our Thank You Book," and of course Christmas will be a rich source of ideas.

The teacher will make the most of every opportunity to stimulate the children's observation and organize their thinking. She takes them on excursions to enlarge their experiences of the community. Some of the children, it is true, have probably visited park and zoo on other occasions, but they will profit by

¹ Collected by the Literature Committee of the Association for Childhood Education. Macmillan.

observing these places under the teacher's guidance. One child brought out this fact when he said, "But I see better when I go with Miss E."

Such an excursion may give rise to a group of posters later to be bound together in a record book. Or the posters may be attached to form a long roll which, placed on a cylinder turned with handles, forms a "movie," much to the children's delight.

During the kindergarten year there is no formal program of reading. The children may incidentally come to recognize some words and groupings, but they are under no compulsion to do so. They compose orally simple accounts of their activities which the teacher records for them. Their interest in their aquarium led one group to compose the following lines:

THE AQUARIUM

We have gold fish in our aquarium.
We put shells in the bowl.
We put in water plants because they
make the fish healthy.
The snails help keep the glass clean.
We feed the fish and snails once a
week.

Watching the familiar lines as the teacher reads them, the children gain an impression of the relationship between the spoken and written symbols. While handling the books on their reading table and commenting on the illustrations, they develop a curiosity about the text.

The same preparatory methods are continued in the first grade. The room should be inviting and homelike in atmosphere. It should be equipped with movable furniture to allow greater informality and easy groupings for the story hour and dramatizations. A window of plants, an aquarium, and a library corner will each be a center of activity. The

teacher encourages the children to talk of their experiences and adds to these with excursions and new interests in the class room. With scrapbooks and posters the children will record these and take great satisfaction in memorizing the explanatory labels that the teacher has added.

In short, there is no sharp break between kindergarten and first grade. Instead there is a period of gradual adjustment with ample allowance for individual differences in maturity. For children without kindergarten experience this period is especially important.

We cannot, then, name the precise age at which a child should be taught to read. Certain tests must precede the introduction of the reading program. Adequate vision and hearing and mental age of six years and four months must be established before the term of reading readiness can be considered complete.

It is true that there is no precise division between inability and ability to read. Between the time of a child's first associations with books and the time when he is able to follow a printed account for himself, there is a period of growing acquaintance with some written symbols and groupings. This forms his introduction to actual reading.

Before reading is begun at all, however, the teacher should have instituted an activity program furnishing experiences with which the first attempts in reading may be related. Children learn to read most readily when the material fulfills a concept already in their minds. Reading is not now taught as a formal subject in the old sense. It does not take the place of the activity program but grows out of the experiences so provided. Some of the old standards of achievement in reading are now recognized as excessive; a more gradual introduction to this skill now is seen to be preferable. The

teacher takes time to become acquainted with the abilities of her class before she pronounces upon their readiness for reading.

The importance of connecting the first reading with the activity program explains the special value of charts and scrapbooks based upon experiences fresh in the children's minds. The varied books on the library table may prove more adaptable as supplements to the current activities than will the average basal text. During the course of the year, the first grade should make a few little books of their own to be placed on the school room shelves. Oral reading and instruction in phonics still have their place in teaching reading, but they are no longer used as laborious drill. Frequent diagnosis of individual progress will guide the teacher in her choice of methods or rather combination of methods suited to each child.

Reading readiness develops through a number of stages. Long before children can read for themselves they can enjoy picture books. They follow stories read to them with an attention span of five or ten minutes, recognize the volumes that contain their favorites, and know that the story is told from the printed text. In consequence whoever reads to children should hold the book so that they can watch the text and the pictures; the children sense the relationship between the blocks of phrases and the inflections of the reader's voice, particularly if the print is large and the lines few to the page. Curiosity about unfamiliar print and an interest in seeing their own names written also characterize children at this stage. They should speak in complete constructions, with general correctness in word order, vocabulary, idiom, and grammar. They can enjoy the library table in the kindergarten and with increasing suc-

cess infer the contents of the books from the illustrations. The idea of having their own experiences recorded interests them, and they recognize the communicative and informative value of written symbols even though they cannot yet make use of them for themselves.

Next the children follow the wording on the charts that they have dictated. They see the connections between the groupings of print and the number of spoken words. Following the teacher's marker across the line on the chart teaches them the left to right movement of print, the progression in lines down the page. They memorize the text of their charts and the legends connected with pictures and objects. They identify separate sentences and can recognize the first and last in a paragraph.

In the course of this practice the children will come to recognize certain common words even when in unfamiliar context. Learning the pronunciation of these words and abandoning incorrect even though related associations comes next. For a while it is enough if the children merely get the general idea of what they read; as they mature they will distinguish with more precision. With beginners, however, analysis is a mere waste of time, for they have not formed visual habits of examining for minute detail; at first they see words as patterns, with little attention to the distinctions between similarly shaped letters.

The most effective reading material for children in the first grade carries but few words to the page. There should be ample repetition of words and phrases. The vocabulary should be familiar to the children. There should be many pictures to make the text more easily comprehensible. At present, many commercial primers fail to meet these requirements. As a result, there is all the more need

Reading Expectancy*

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READING EXPECTANCY is not identical with reading *readiness*. Many children expect to read who are not ready to do so. Unfavorable emotional attitudes toward the process have been acquired before the pupils enter the first grade, and thus even though the child may pass a reading readiness test, he may not be ready to read the material provided.

Over seven hundred kindergarten pupils were interviewed by student-teachers who were doing their practice-teaching in thirty-one kindergartens of the New York City Public Schools. A series of questions, devised to discover what these pupils expected the first grade to be like, was used one month before the classes were promoted. All sections of the city were represented, and an almost even number of boys and girls were given the interviews. This was not a scientific study, but one planned to give the young teachers an insight into the problems of beginning reading. The results appeared to be sufficiently important to bring to the attention of other teachers confronted with similar difficulties.

The interviews were conducted informally, and individually whenever this was possible. The student-teachers began by saying; "You will soon be in the first grade. What do you think you will do there?" A second student recorded the responses made by the children.

Approximately half of the children stated that they expected to read, and almost as many believed that they would

spell, write, and "do arithmetic." Some even contemplated long division and multiplication tables!

One-tenth of the pupils thought that they would have home work in the first grade and six of these tots contemplated "having tests on Fridays." One was doubtful, but thought flash cards "*might* be fun;" others said that they would "sit in their seats and be quiet." Many mentioned that they expected "to be good" and "study hard."

Some looked forward to the fact that they could "stay all day," "bring lunch" and "maybe draw and use clay." One said he thought that he would whisper, but many more believed that there would be a great deal of play similar to that in the kindergarten.

Following this question, the interviewer asked; "Who told you that you would read in the first grade?" The replies indicated that the mother, sister, brother, or a friend was the person who was usually responsible for the belief. Few of the kindergarten teachers had talked about reading at that time, although some had planned to do so before the children were promoted.

The next question was, "Do you think reading will be easy or hard for *you*?"

Here the answers were divided. One-half thought that reading would be hard, only one-third believed that it would be easy and the remainder were not sure.

The question, "Why do you think it will be hard?" asked of those who gave this response, brought out the fact that the parents had told them so in most

* Data presented in this paper were secured through the co-operation of students of Ed. 15.43 and their supervisor, Miss Edna Barre, of Hunter College.

cases. Some children remarked "My mother said she had a terrible time in 1-A"; "My daddy said I'd have hard work to do." Older children had told them reading was not easy, and one boy said mournfully, "My brother is in 5-A and he still can't read."

Fears of their own inadequacy were shown through such comments as: "I don't learn fast—my mother says so." "I don't know a lot," "I won't be able to do well," and "You make mistakes and the teacher hollers at you."

All of the kindergartens were well supplied with picture books and other reading materials. The children had handled these and possibly this accounted for some such remarks as "There's such a lot to finish," or "I don't know my letters." One sighed and said, "It must take a long time to finish a book—I know I'll get tired." Another looked worried as he said, "The pages have numbers. I can't read those either."

The usual answer was "I don't know how," "New things are always hard," or as one said, "It's hard what you don't know." Three mentioned that "The writing is too little."

A boy said, "I just know I can't read newspapers," and another felt that reading "Ought to be saved for high school—I am too little now." Still another believed that he would be made to read too fast and said, "And it's no use to try to hurry me. My Dad says I'm just like my mother."

One little girl frowned as she remarked "You have to learn by yourself," and others stated that "Questions teachers ask are always hard to answer. I think they ask you what you read about."

Following these responses, the interviewer tried to cheer the children and asked what they would like to read about when they were in the first grade.

As might be expected, animals took first place, but few mentioned the domestic pets or farm animals. They clamored for strange or wild beasts. Fairy tales were great favorites, and were usually those that had been read or told by the kindergarten teacher. Modern fantastic tales, such as *Ferdinand*, *Babar*, and *Noodle* were mentioned by name.

A surprisingly large number mentioned "The Lone Ranger," for one might imagine that such young children would not be likely to listen to this radio program. Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck (and his nephews in particular) were asked for often. Shirley Temple and Tarzan were requested as well. Even five-year-old children were familiar with "The Dead End Kids," and thought that they would enjoy reading about them. Cow-boys and Indians were much desired for reading subjects by the boys.

In almost every class, some of the children said that they would like to read about President Roosevelt, "Our Country," Lincoln, and Washington, and even mentioned the word history in connection with these choices of patriotic subjects.

Stories about flowers were wanted, and a small number of girls mentioned dolls. Very few asked for material about the community helpers, such as the postman or milkman, and only one of the seven hundred wanted to read about a farm. Remember that these were city children.

Several boys mentioned soldiers, airplanes, submarines and guns. G-men and policemen were more popular than these. Other items were scattering with no more than one request for each.

The pupils seemed to be familiar with with the characters of the basal readers used in the first grades in their schools. Whenever the names of boys or girls

were mentioned, these characters were mentioned as "about 'Alice and Jerry' or 'Peter and Peggy'." There was no strong demand for material of this type. One exception was in a class whose teacher had made up stories based upon the experiences her own pupils had had or which they longed to have.

These data seem to indicate that even these extremely young children are now demanding the speed and action that is being supplied by the motion picture and radio, and expect to find it in the books which they will read in the first grade.

Much has been written about developing concepts for the specific materials which are to be read. Is it not possible that we are going into the matter backward, and that it would be better to construct reading books which are based upon the concepts which the child already has?

Satisfaction of his purposes and interests will lead to an understanding of reading that will not necessitate following the suggestion that the kindergarten teacher "can only undertake to give the children an abundance of the sort of concepts that seem to be important on the basis of an examination of primers and first readers, and endeavor to make them real and varied in nature."¹

Must we fit the child to his text books, or should we write the text book to fit the modern child? He understands the environment in which he lives, and if this environment is one lacking rich cultural experiences, either reading must be delayed until such experiences have been provided, or we may start where the child is when he enters the first grade.

¹ Harrison, M. L. *Reading Readiness* Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936, p. 34.

Regardless of their background, most children at the present time expect to read in the first grade. Many expect it to be a difficult experience, perhaps due to the attitude which has been fostered in them by others who have had unsuitable reading material.

These conclusions may be drawn from this minor investigation. Pupils entering the first grade are more interested in the less familiar animals than in any other topic. They prefer action and fantasy to realism, and expect to read about persons and situations that are not found in most primary reading books.

This does not indicate a return to the old "literary readers" with the distorted classics, or to myths and legends, but does mean the services of authors who can write new primers that are in tune with the times. Each year the format and illustrations of the new books improve, but the context is little changed. As one kindergarten child said, "I suppose we will read:

'This is a boy.

This is a girl.'"

Must this reading expectancy be fulfilled? The stable child may meet the new learning situation as this one did, in a resigned fashion, but many more showed their fears and anxieties, in spite of the fact that the kindergarten teachers had not discussed the problems facing them. It is possible that further research might show that these emotional factors are more responsible than the mastery of letter symbols, either of form or sound, in prognosticating reading success.²

² Wilson, F. T., Fleming, G. W., Burke, A., and Garrison, C. G. *Reading Progress in Kindergarten and Primary Grades*. Elementary School Journal, Vol. XXXVIII (1938) pp. 314-315.

The Articulation of the Elementary with the High School*

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IT IS A HEARTENING thing to those who sincerely desire progressive change in education that The National Council of Teachers of English should invite a general educator to lead off in its annual deliberations with such a topic as you proposed for me: The Articulation of the Elementary With the High School. It would appear that here is a group of subject-matter experts interested in something much broader than the articulation of the English work, as such, between the two levels specified. This topic as stated indicates that you are concerning yourselves with nothing less than the whole transition from childhood to adolescence. . . There is, in my judgment, a great opportunity to go forward in American education in the area of the secondary schools, by adopting, as our point of attack, the nature of the individual boy or girl, as contrasted with our present adherence to block, or class stereotypes of logically segregated subject matters. Epictetus remarks somewhere, in effect: "Many are they who, stopping at a roadhouse for the night, are betrayed by the comfort of the accommodations, and mistake it for the end of their journey." As teachers we have immense vested interests in these stereotyped subject-matter arrangements; they are, indeed, "the comfort of the accommodations." But they are far from being "the end of the journey." The whole system which they represent is merely the compromise of factory expediency forced by the overwhelming masses of children suddenly dumped into our schools in the pursuit

of the democratic thesis. If, as teachers, we sell out to that system, we thwart the further reach of sincere and effective democracy. For if we mean business, as teachers in a democratic society, we must believe that the critical and essential business of such a society is the full development of every one of its members and we must act upon that belief. We must not surrender to either the psychological or the quantitative difficulties involved, although they are very great. What is needed is not a sudden and complete revolution. What is needed is rather patient and convincing demonstrations, scattered widely throughout the country, and their gradual penetration and spread.

I rejoice, therefore, at this renewed evidence that you of this Council are educators before you are English teachers, and shall address myself first to some of the wider implications of articulation between elementary and high schools, coming later to some narrower issues of the articulation of English within that wider frame. One other word of definition: I shall be thinking in terms of the 6-3-3 set-up. Those of you who happen to be working in 7-4 or 8-4 organizations will need to adapt what I say as far as it fits your situations, or to reject it where it does not. First, then, to some of the wider implications of our topic, independent of English.

In general, the segregation of boys and girls into schools housing grades seven, eight and nine is probably good in that

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it is in line with their biological phases and their psychological needs. Roughly, modern school divisions seem to conform with stages of growth: nursery schools and kindergartens with infancy, elementary schools with childhood, junior and senior highs with early and late adolescence. But the breaks between all these divisions are likely to be unnecessarily abrupt, and steps should be taken to make all of them less so. I confine myself here to that between grades six and seven.

The junior high school, which seemed to offer the solution to so many problems in 1915, has fallen off in some important respects from its original promise. It has tended to retreat on the side of its exploratory function, and it has extended and further entrenched upon academic scholarship in terms of pigeonholed subjects, two grades farther down than the old four-year high school. This it has done in the face of a convincing demonstration in grades one to six that the atomistic psychology is artificial and, at bottom, anti-social. Organization of grades seven, eight and nine in imitation of the high school is imitation of a thing partly wrong in itself and certainly premature and inappropriate for large numbers, if not the majority of the boys and girls concerned. As teachers, we are likely not to pursue, with insight and fidelity, the nature of childhood and of learning; it is so much easier to confine children to the areas of our own adult specialties, where we can exercise an easy and complacent superiority, and demand that they, half-grown, all shall be specialists in everything. It would be a chastening and revealing experience if we would more frequently reverse the process, and go fishing or play soccer with youngsters who are specialists in those arts—in a word, place ourselves in the true conditions of learning.

The best elementary schools, meanwhile, have moved forward much faster and farther than the junior high schools. It is true that the old elementary schools were drab, impoverished and juiceless, but the modern lower schools have vital lessons to teach the junior high. And these lessons form the basis of true and essential articulation. I shall touch upon some of them briefly without attempting to develop them in detail.

The child as a person should be the center of intelligent and sensitive school organization, at least to grade nine. It is not unusual, in good elementary school practice, for the same group of children to remain together, as a little society within the greater one, for six or seven years. This is done partly to counteract the fact that life in America is increasingly rootless; families have no permanent homestead or sense of ancient ties. The elementary school acts on the theory that, in childhood, at least, life should be protected in a chrysalis of security. Now the new deal in the junior high school, by which these old classes are broken up and re-shuffled at the beginning of adolescence, is, on the whole, good and re-energizing. We have all noted the fresh start, the joy of promotion, and the inspiration of entirely new friendships. But the sudden and complete scattering of a class group to an absolute miscellany of unrelated teachers and pigeonholed subject matters at the grade-seven level means that the thing is overdone; it leaves all of the children bewildered, and some of them overwhelmed. A wiser principle of articulation would carry over the idea of a mother-or father-teacher handling a group of children in an inclusive, flexible correlation of old subject areas, with supporting specialists in arts and crafts, physical education and the like—a continuation of the best elemen-

tary school practice. A grade-seven group, in short, should be completely in the control of one person—adviser and teacher. The class process should be essentially learning by doing, an activity program fusing functionally the materials of English, social studies, science, mathematics and the arts in purposeful units, bringing in expert special teaching at high points and with honest and adequate provision for drills and practice exercises as needed. Teachers should not be assigned irrevocably and narrowly to a single grade, a single subject, or a single school. They should move with particular groups of children from as low as the fifth to as high as the ninth grades, greatly softening or obliterating the present iron line between grades six and seven, i.e. between the elementary and the junior high schools. If, as teachers, you reel back from this, I can only plead that the prime determinant of skilled school organization is not the convenience of the teacher but the integrity and growth-as-a-whole of the individual child.

I am inclined to believe that the same teacher should teach two or three of the present subject-matter areas in grades eight and nine, presumably in wiser and more useful relation to each other, and that, in precisely the same way as between grades six and seven, the same teacher should go with particular groups from grade nine into grade ten, breaking down the present poor articulation at *that* point. The same teacher-adviser, or home-room teacher, should accompany a home-room group through their three years of junior high, if none of the rest of this is done. This is already the practice in many schools. My whole point is that particular children, in a particular group, should be the center of gravity for sound education, rather than any artificial and extraneous arrangement of subject-

matter, particularly in water-tight compartments, and that articulation should be thought of horizontally as well as vertically. Along with this should be developed far more personal and complete records, and immensely more emphasis upon the development of the unique personality of each child as a whole—his habits, his basic attitudes, his emotions, his tastes, as well as his knowledges and skills.

Now let us address ourselves more particularly to articulation as it concerns the teaching of English.

Here, again, the articulation may be more wisely stated in terms of the particular boy or girl taught than in terms of any external and uniform course of study. The course of study is to be discovered in the child. The longer I have to do with growing children the more I believe that chronological age is the most useful single criterion for age and class grouping. Practically speaking, it *is* the basis on which children are graded and move along. For the penetrating and skilled English teacher, this means that no amount of printing "objectives" grade by grade will obscure the actual spread between children in any single class or year group in any language item, skill or power you please to name—spelling, reading, thinking, speaking or what-not. The Pennsylvania Study of the Carnegie Foundation showed this spread in all subject areas and grades to be simply abysmal. No amount of ability grouping by the administration will ever give to the teacher of the mother-tongue an homogeneous group—i.e. a group in which the children do not differ widely, and do not fall into all manner of sub-groupings as regards any of these skills or powers.

I would not discourage efforts to set up objectives for all grades, ordered in

appropriate steps and striven for with a faith that passeth understanding. But the articulation which promises most, I am persuaded, lies in defining, equally on the elementary and secondary sides of the dividing line, those specific elements in "English" skill and power which we consider important, in measuring these, individually and with increasing precision, in particular boys and girls, and in promoting them as far as possible, through large activities calling for bona fide exercise of the powers. For effective carry-over, or articulation, we need less "promise to pay" in terms of hope expressed in abstract courses, and more honest, complete and individual progress reports as to exactly what a particular pupil does or does not know—can or cannot do—perhaps, even beyond this, what he is or is not. Personally, I consider that an extremely promising and important phase of articulation lies in the extended use of standardized diagnostic or analytical measures of performance, readily comparable as between one date and another, and as between different pupils, classes, grades, and schools, and in extended development of records which transmit in such terms what is known about a child from grade to grade and particularly across the transfer point between elementary and high schools.

Such records cannot and should not be the unaided responsibility of the class teacher. The work of the Education Records Bureau of this city for its member schools, the work in practically all high school subjects, notably English, of Dr. Eugene Smith's sub-committee and of Dr. Ralph Tyler's Evaluation Committee of the Progressive Education Asso-

ciation's Eight-Year Project in the area of the Relations of Colleges and Secondary Schools, point the way, in English as in other fields, to the kind of articulation we are seeking.

Perhaps I could summarize best what I have tried to say by a single bold statement: We should go far toward essential articulation if we ceased to speak or think about a Junior High School at all, and instead began to think, speak and govern ourselves in relation to a *middle school*—a school which stands in its own peculiar and unique right as fitting the nature and needs of early adolescence. Instead of aping the exaggerated and one-sided emphasis of the senior high upon academic values, such a middle school would absorb and further develop certain other values which I have mentioned, and which have been convincingly demonstrated by the best elementary schools, for the most part since 1915—that is, since the junior high school was doing its best thinking and institutional development.

And, as regards English, we shall go farthest and fastest, not by writing more paper courses of study, but by analyzing and measuring where particular children are, in relation to significant elements of speaking, reading, writing and thinking, by carrying over the best teaching-in-whole-situations from elementary to middle school, by effecting a system of records, nation-wide, which really record and transmit, without something like a 90% loss, that which we know about the whole individual whom we have to teach, and by developing a type of teacher who can manage all this with the least waste and the greatest measure of success.

The Newbery Award

Open Forum

RESPONSE to the invitation issued in *The Review* of November, 1939, to voice opinions of the Newbery Award books, has been enthusiastic. Letters which have come to *The Review* office indicate an interest in children's literature so deep, so lively, and so wide-spread that it must encourage everyone who loves children and books, singly or in combination.

The occasion for the discussion was the publication of an editorial in the October, 1939, issue, entitled "What Are Little Boys Made Of?" In substance the editorial said that the Newbery Award Committee had of late selected books which were not of interest to children, and which in many cases did not merit the award. The editorial further pointed out that the volumes recently chosen were signally lacking in vigor.

In November, a second editorial on the same subject stated that recently the award does not appear to be in conformity with the ideals of its donor (Mr. Frederic Melcher) who understands boys and girls. It was suggested that a freer discussion of candidates for the award might result in a selection of books better suited to children's tastes.

The case for the school librarians was ably presented by Miss Helen Ruth Montague, school librarian jointly with the Public Library and the Public Schools of Council Bluffs, Iowa. Her letter is reprinted here with permission:

The remedy exists. School librarian members of A. L. A. are entitled to vote for the Newbery Award. Most of us do not exercise that right. We are high school folks, or busy with supervision and administration. We feel a lack of knowledge about

the current trends in juvenile publications. We seize upon those we need and let the others go. Last spring we sent in a small handful of votes. We might have changed the decision.

School librarians are well aware of the sentimental streak in children's librarians. Why it continues to flourish in this cold scientific age is a mystery. But it does. And some of the clear-headed vote for sentimental tales. The Children's Section of A. L. A. bestows the Newbery Award. But school librarians can and will out-vote that group when school people care enough about the development of children's literature to join the A. L. A. School Section and make use of their prerogatives.

A situation discussed in private but not aired in public is that divergent views of juvenile literature and fear of professional elimination enter into all relationships between school and children's librarians. The schools have accused the librarians of being high-hat. The children's librarians fear that we are going to gobble them up as surely as Red Riding Hood met the wolf.

So long as school librarians are required to keep up N. E. A. membership to give 100% standing in their local schools, we are unable to develop a united school library front in A. L. A. So long as we school librarians believe libraries and adult education are important, we shall wish to continue library connections. It seems to me that the Newbery Award is a case in point. It would be a sad mistake for school libraries to go over wholly to N. E. A.

I'm glad to see the elementary school people taking up this question in your editorial columns. Newbery Awards should be questioned, evaluated in relation to children's literature. And if they are awarded to vital books, the school librarians will be voting as they should have done in the past two years.

Other responses have come from teachers and librarians. One librarian, working closely with children, voiced the

opinion that children's librarians frequently held teachers and school librarians incompetent when it came to the matter of choice of titles. The same correspondent went on to say that frequently the influential children's librarians were not in direct contact with children, but nevertheless felt themselves qualified to select children's books, despite their "artificial and superficial backgrounds."

The feeling was also expressed that the group of children's librarians responsible for the selection of the book to receive the award had adopted a rather dogmatic attitude.

A teachers college instructor writes, "I liked especially the point [in the editorial] that the librarians imply a kind of 'ex-cathedra' judgment in these awards. It has been a matter of a little amusement and considerable concern to most teachers that the librarians should take so pontifical an attitude towards them."

One school librarian whose Master of Arts thesis was on the subject of children's literature, wrote that experiment with thousands of elementary school children forced her to the conclusion that in most cases the volumes awarded the Newbery Medal were not children's books. She added that when she expressed this opinion, she was sharply reprimanded by a superior.

Another school librarian admitted that although she disapproved of the choices of the Newbery Award committee, she lacked the courage to criticize the choices. She went on to say that she had attempted to build up respect for the Newbery books among her pupils, but of late had been obliged to cease recommending the titles. She concluded, "It almost seems as if the awards are to honor authors," rather than to select books of distinction in this field.

This timidity on the part of school librarians was very evident from the fact that many anonymous criticisms were received. One reader clipped and annotated book-reviewers from a magazine devoted to children's literature. Some of her comments were very pertinent. For example, "Librarians make too much of the graphic arts and illustrations. 'Clothes' do not help to put the great in the hall of fame." She likewise criticized a recommended list of children's books (prepared by a prominent children's librarian) as "too sentimental for children, too old for children, and not at all the sort of thing that children voluntarily select."

Two letters were received from the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Section for Library Work with Children of the American Library Association (the organization that confers the Newbery Award). The following selections are quoted with permission.

Miss Lesley Newton, Chairman of the Children's Section, wrote:

I wish you could know the diversity of opinion that attends the bestowing of this award, and the very careful weighing of elements that enter into the second ballot. Straw votes are often taken from children's and school librarians who have had actual experience with the books and whose opinions reflect, in a measure, the children's judgments. If we are fortunate enough to know any teachers who have been able to keep up with the current output of children's books, we welcome their contributions. It is perhaps unfortunate that so many of the books chosen recently have been feminine in appeal, but we must not forget that there are little girl children, too, and the joy which *Thimble Summer* has been read is fairly good proof of its appeal. Both *Caddie Woodlawn* and *Roller Skates* are constantly read by very modern and tomboyish girls while some of the earlier awards languish on our shelves.

The Vice-Chairman of the Children's Section, Miss Irene Smith, wrote:

We do not wish to have most of the awards go to the books which appeal mainly to girls, but if books of equal distinction are not written for boys, the committee has no choice. Neither of the books you praise for older boys is read with enthusiasm by our borrowers. On the other hand, *Roller Skates*, *Caddie Woodlawn*, and *Thimble Summer* are all loved by little girls of the age for which they were written. So you see how difficult it is for critics to agree on values in books for children. As I wrote Mr. Melcher, this year's committee will seek earnestly for *literary masculinity*, but whether or not we shall both find it and agree that we have found it remains to be seen.

Still another correspondent indicated that the librarians themselves are not unanimous in approval of the choices of the Committee. She wrote that many librarians were "floored by *Hitty*, *The Cat that Went to Heaven*, *Roller Skates*, and *Thimble Summer*."

A teachers college instructor, a person thoroughly informed in children's literature, suggested that there was a confusion of motives in selecting the book for the Newbery Award. She felt that there should be less emphasis on literary writing, and more concern for child interests. Another correspondent put it concretely: "Sometimes I think those who can write he-man stuff ought to be stirred up."

The lively interest evidenced by these replies would seem to indicate that children's literature has gained an invaluable critical audience which should encourage higher levels of achievement.

Correspondence and expressions of opinion on the forthcoming 1940 award are invited.

INTELLIGENCE AND ARTISTRY IN TEACHING READING

(Continued from page 138)

add to the understanding and enjoyment of literature as the musicians and actors in an opera increase the significance and appeal of the libretto—this should be the accepted objective of the teacher of literature and reading. That this requires

effort and talent cannot be denied. Is there any real job for the teacher of literature? In my opinion, no assignment in the entire school curriculum calls for more intelligence and artistry than the teaching of reading and literature.

SIGNS ON THE READING HIGHWAY

(Continued from page 152)

for a library table well supplied with attractive volumes and for charts and other material of the teacher's construction.

In the primary grades of a progressive school, reading is so integrated with the activity program that it fits easily into the children's experience. They accept both

as a necessary means of information and as a source of pleasure. The "reading period" is not the dreaded toil of early days, a nightmare of unfamiliar symbols representing ideas unrelated to the children's daily life. Instead the accomplishment of reading is a proud exercise of new power and enjoyment.

Editorial

Adult Patterns Again

WRITING OF "Growth of Interest and Appreciation in Reading" (page 139) Dr. Gray observes that "we may be entering a new period in which adult interests and preferences will again be imposed on children to a questionable extent." Considerable evidence in support of this statement is to be found in this issue of *The Review*.

Dr. Gates (page 133) points to the increasing tendency to over-weigh the literature offered in school with social studies content, and to the "milk-toast" tradition so prevalent in children's trade books. Dr. Brumbaugh's investigation of children's reading expectancy (page 153) reveals that kindergarten children have little interest in the subjects usually treated in beginning readers. They are indifferent to the community helpers, to the farm, and to the pallid doings of "Peter and Peggy." Children are not necessarily interested in subject matter merely because it comes within range of their experiences.

Working from another angle, Mrs. Factor ("Preventing Reading Failures Before First Grade Entrance," page 144) discovered that if children are to read successfully the material furnished in primers and primary reading books, experiences have to be artificially supplied. The children are not acquainted with the things that textbook writers offer as realistic and close to the child's everyday life.

Taken together, these findings seem to indicate that in spite of sincere efforts on the part of textbook authors and writers of trade books to provide reading material that reflects the experiences and

interests of children, many children are unacquainted with their own immediate environments, and those who have explored their surroundings do not find them particularly interesting. It appears that our elementary reading texts and a prominent part of the trade literature for children are as far from children's experiences as they were a half-century ago, and what is even more ominous, as far or farther from their interests.

Reading is basic to all education. It is an indispensable tool. But it is also a source of comfort and joy. It is, as Dr. Gates says, "an extremely easy, non-fatiguing, highly controllable, and satisfying activity." That so few children find it so is due, as Dr. Gates points out, to the unappetizing fare offered in text and trade-books.

To indenture school reading to any one subject—even a subject as broad as social studies—is to defeat the ends of education. To restrict recreational reading to lists of books selected in the milk-toast tradition, is to destroy cultural wealth.

There is no necessity for the existence of either situation. There is available a rich hoard of literature for young people. Books for every type of child. Books for every age, for every taste, for every level of reading ability or disability. The teacher who knows this body of children's literature—who can work this rich mine—need not have a single reading failure in her classes. Moreover, recently-published reading series show increasing awareness of children's real interests.

So, despite the validity of Dr. Gray's and Dr. Gates' predictions, teachers who

know children's literature, who understand and respect children's interests, and who have the courage to speak up can stop the retrogression to adult-imposed subject-matter and namby-pamby literature.

DR. WILLIS L. UHL

American Education suffered a great loss in the death of Willis L. Uhl on February 28, 1940. At the time of his death, Dr. Uhl was Dean of the School of Education of the University of Washington. He was actively engaged in research, serving as chairman of a committee of The National Conference on Research in English, preparing a monograph on the unification of the reading program in the elementary grades.

He was also a member of the various other educational organizations, including the Society for the Study of Education, the Educational Research Associa-

tion, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in which he served as secretary of Section Q in 1929.

Dr. Uhl was a highly versatile educator: his experience included teaching in rural schools, administration as a superintendent of schools, and teaching in Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin. He was Dean of the School of Education of the University of Wisconsin from 1925 to 1928. In 1928 he became Dean of the School of Education of the University of Washington.

In the field of editing and writing, he was associate editor of the *Journal of Educational Research* and of the *Junior-Senior High School Clearing House*, and author of a number of books dealing with supervision, educational principles, and the teaching of reading.

Those who knew Dr. Uhl professionally will feel keenly the loss of a logical and versatile mind, and a reassuring, friendly personality.

PREVENTING READING FAILURES

(Continued from page 148)

Of the eight children who comprised the first experimental pre-reading group, each one presented an individual problem, yet each one needed the group program in varying degrees. Six were recommended for, and are now doing first grade work. Of these six, five are achieving a degree of success compatible with their predicted abilities. The sixth is fulfilling the prediction of a possible reading difficulty due to early and continued interference with the use of his proper hand, with a resultant mixed eye-hand dominance.

While it is not conclusive or fair to measure results on the basis of only six months' work, nor at the short range of a year, as far as can be known at present there is great need for this type

of preventive work in a limited environment, from which the children are admitted to the first grade of public school at the age of five years, or five years and six months.

As far as can be known at present, five children were launched on school careers under the stimulating influence of success, instead of under the deadening weight of failure.

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Reviews and Abstracts

English in Action. By R. W. Bardwell, Ethel Mabie Falk, and J. C. Tressler. Grade 3, *Making Plans*; Grade 4, *Sharing Interests*; Grade 5, *Exchanging Thoughts*; Grade 6, *Expressing Ideas*. D. C. Heath and Company, 1940.

The series entitled *Elementary English in Action* for grades three through six, published by D. C. Heath and Company in 1935, has recently been revised and published under the series title *English in Action* with an individual title for the volume at each grade level. The authorship remains the same for the series.

The objectives toward which the series is directed are stated in the preface of each volume as four in number: (1) to broaden children's ideas about which they will wish to speak and write; (2) to provide social situations that will require letters, discussion, reports, conversation, notices, invitations, summaries of reading, telephoning, and interviews; (3) to make children sensitive to their listeners and aware of their obligations as listeners when others are speaking; and (4) to provide for differences in capacities and needs through many small group and individual activities closely related to the purposes of the class.

In meeting these objectives, the series follows a distinct pattern. Each volume is divided into two separate parts: (1) a series of composition units which set up social situations that motivate suggested language activities, and (2) a handbook which contains drill and test exercises pertaining to correct usage, capitalization, and punctuation, together with samples of correct form in writing. The composition activities themselves follow a plan which carries over into each volume. The topics, or units, listed (usually eight in a volume) include a study of the school and its activities; the observance of the major holidays and numerous minor ones; and from three to five units which are closely related to those often regularly taught in the curriculums offered in science and the social studies.

The activities pertaining to school are concerned mainly with orienting pupils to school life, developing a school newspaper or magazine, learning to use the library, and setting up club projects. In the upper grades there are units on hobbies, the radio and a very brief one on the motion picture. Sample units which are closely related to the field of science are "The Night Sky," "Wild Animals," "Watching the Weather," and "Our Bird Friends." Typical units which are closely related to the social studies are "Safety at Home and at School," "About Cities," and "Gifts from Ancient Greece." Though there is some repetition of the language activities woven into the observance of

the holidays which are included in each volume, the activities suggested are fairly well varied and include worthwhile challenges to developing a good command of oral and written language.

In those units where the children possess initially the necessary background for communication on the topic; the authors set up a social situation which stimulates language activities in various ways. These include writing labels for bulletin boards, writing invitations to a school exhibit, planning projects or reports in committees, reporting a special interest, interviewing a member of the community, and many others. In those units where a background of information must first be built up before there can be communication of ideas, the authors supply bibliographies of source materials, give excerpts from books, or include explanatory passages which contain the necessary information. A generous number of illustrations, some drawings and some photographs, help furnish the children the necessary background for an understanding of the unit.

In the opinion of this reviewer, a great deal would have been added to the series by more complete bibliographies of supplementary reading. In most instances, the booklists are extremely brief and are further limited by specific references to a few textbooks, which may or may not be available in a given school. While it is true that other books may likewise not be available, suggestive lists are often good arguments for increasing the library facilities of the school and for that reason, if for no other, textbook writers ought to include a wide choice of suitable reference materials in connection with a reading unit.

Children are stimulated to use the background material which they acquire as described above, by suggestions for socialized language situations in which it is necessary for them to reproduce in groups or singly, some of the information they have learned through reading or through observation. For the most part, these situations seem worth undertaking and through them children will undoubtedly feel the need for communication.

Aids are supplied to help the child in developing standards for his participation in oral speech and in written composition. For the various types of activities, especially when each is initially introduced, standards for performance are set up. These are emphasized by format and are simply worded statements as to what techniques and practices are socially and personally important to successful achievement in the language activity under consideration. Further help is supplied by suggestive questions raised preparatory to beginning

THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW

work on any given report, panel discussion, interview, or other activity. At very infrequent intervals, vocabulary lists are included. Much more, it would seem, could have been added in the way of further help in this latter respect. Dictionary work in vocabulary building should be introduced earlier than grade six, at which level, in this series, it is considered in only a cursory manner.

One of the most important features of the series is the constant relationship maintained between the stimulation and expression of ideas and correctness in speech. In each unit, the skills which are necessary in carrying out the suggested language activities are pointed out, and specific reference is made to sections of the Handbook which deal with those particular skills. In each section, explanations of correct form with exercise materials are included so that the child may know what form is correct and have opportunity for practicing it until he gains in power to use it. Though the idea behind this organization is splendid and the materials supplied are good, it seems that certain improvements could be made in carrying it out, especially in the matter of pre-tests. The child is told in the composition text, "If you need help in this or that particular, turn to a certain page of the Handbook and do the exercise indicated." It would seem better to have the child turn to a pre-test in the Handbook and from the results obtained from it, he should be advised further concerning the necessity for drill work. In only a few instances are such pre-tests supplied. It would be helpful, too, to have more drill exercises than are now included in the Handbook, especially for the correction of such common errors as are prevalent with the past and past participle forms of such verbs as *see*, *do*, and others.

In connection with children's use of the Handbook section, specially in the upper grades, more should have been made of the opportunity for teaching children to use it independently as a source of reference. Under the system set up in the texts, children were always directed to the exact page and to the exact exercise needed. In connection with learning to use an index, splendid drill could have been given in showing them how to consult the Handbook as a guide for all writing and speaking; thus the concept of the need for correct-

ness in communication could have been made to carry over more closely into all language situations.

The teacher introducing these books will need to plan carefully for their use. The early units in each volume might well be taught at the beginning of the school year. The chapters on holidays will have to be distributed over suitable periods of the year. If the units included on science and social studies are likewise taught in these curriculums, some provision ought to be made for correlation and integration of the English work with that of these departments. In schools where a different emphasis is given to these particular units in the other subject fields, perhaps similar topics could be substituted in the English curriculum, using the techniques suggested by *English in Action*. In most cases, teachers will need to look for opportunities other than those suggested by the series for the stimulation and development of creative writing. The help given the child (and the teacher) for this type of writing is meager and vague. As has been mentioned earlier, the drill materials included in the Handbook of each volume are only suggestive and will need to be supplemented for most children by additional exercises.

In a series which succeeds as well as this one does in making language socially and personally significant and which provides as carefully as this one does for growth in language power, it seems regrettable that minor errors and inadequacies of the books must be mentioned. However, in some instances, directions to the children are not clear; there are errors in authors' names; the bibliographical form used in the booklists is not consistent; references made to pages in the Handbook are sometimes wrong; and a few of the illustrations are not accurate or clear.

It seems fair to say that these authors have succeeded well in meeting their stated objectives and that *English in Action* is a series which places the emphasis, in teaching children to master the spoken and written language, very definitely on social needs for communication.

—MARION EDMAN
Supervising Instructor,
Language Education Department,
Detroit Public Schools.

MY ENGLISH

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